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Bureau of Intelligence and Research

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ASSESSMENT OF CURRENT SOVIET INTENTIONS IN THE BERLIN CRISIS:
FEBRUARY 15-21CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS

Negotiations. Investative commentator Polyakov February 20 again discussed the course of the Thompson-Gromyko talks, asserting that "hope for a fruitful exchange of opinion is rapidly fading" and that the US apparently "wants to drive the matter into a blind alley." He dismissed in toto the Western proposals for an all-Berlin arrangement and an international access authority as "senseless" and "fantastic", but noted without comment that the US in turn regarded the "only solution" — a Berlin free city — as equally unacceptable. He pointed out the US was evading "other issues" but cited in this connection only the question of the borders of East Germany.

If the US should persist in disregarding the GDR's lawful rights, according to the article, Moscow would construe this as meaning Washington does not intend to engage in businesslike exchanges. (Polyakov further threatened that any Western "tests of strength" or violations of the GDR's sovereignty would be met with "quick and destructive retaliation.") The Investative commentary also interpreted the change in NATO defense plans (assigning defense of the Hamburg area to the FRG in place of Britain) and the NATO travel restrictions on GDR citizens as further Western attempts to prejudice the course of the Moscow talks.

Military Preparations and Demonstrations. Soviet activity in the Berlin air corridors continued throughout the week. The USSR controller again notified the Berlin Air Safety Center (BASC) that flight space in the corridors up to 7,000 feet would be reserved for Soviet military flights the mornings of February 15, 16, and 19. (The February 16 reservation was subsequently cancelled because of weather conditions.) As had been the case with earlier such reservations, special Allied flights were instituted during the three periods in question. Some were subjected to identification passes and bombing; one US transport on February 15 was repeatedly approached by a Soviet fighter which was evidently attempting to force it to land.

On February 15 the Soviet controller at BASC also confronted his Western counterparts with a demand for procedural changes in the filing of flight plans, insisting that flight plans be filed 24 hours in advance with border crossing times included, that actual crossing times be reported as soon as possible, and that stated flight levels be strictly maintained. The Soviet controller continued to initial flight plans submitted to him but added a notation that "flight safety was not guaranteed for those flights without border crossing times indicated."

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The Allied protest to Moscow February 15 on the harassment in the corridors was answered by Moscow two days later with the assertion that Soviet flights over GDR territory are regulated by USSR-GDR agreement and not by US authorities. The note also insisted that Western air access to Berlin was not "unrestricted" and implied that air safety for other aircraft flying at the same time as the Soviets was a Western responsibility since BASC had been notified of Soviet flight intentions.

The afternoon of February 19, the Soviets altered their earlier tactics and instead of reserving air space filed flight plans of their own for military transport flights in the south corridor the following day. The same tactic was repeated February 20 and 21. Allied military aircraft again flew the corridors during the time of the Soviet flights.

Several members of the Soviet military mission stationed in Frankfurt left the city ostensibly on route to a military conference in the GDR. The missions assigned to the British and French zones apparently have remained at their stations.

The East German youth organization, the FDJ, has announced a "Week of Defense Readiness" to begin with Soviet Army Day February 23 and end March 1. The occasion is allegedly to be marked with mass rallies, field exercises of paramilitary groups, joint activities with Soviet soldiers, and military rallies of the GDR army.

After several weeks' silence on the subject, the GDR press February 19 carried a critique on the "Long Thrust" operation, deriding its effectiveness and stressing the superiority of Soviet air power as demonstrated at Tushino.

Berlin and Germany. No changes in ground access procedures to or within Berlin were reported during the week.

GDR Deputy Foreign Minister Otto Winzer, in a press interview February 19, insisted that the present documentation required of all persons transiting the GDR to West Berlin was the equivalent of a compulsory passport and visa requirement and that these procedures had been accepted by the Western powers for years. Winzer argued that a compulsory passport and visa requirement for travel to Berlin could not in any way be construed as blocking access since such requirements had in fact been in force for over a decade.

During January access roads to the East German border in the Thuringia area opposite Fulda were rendered unusable by GDR demolition squads. Only the autobahn approach near Obersuhl now remains intact, indicating the GDR authorities intend to close the present Wartha frontier station, leaving Obersuhl the only frontier crossing point in the area.

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FRG Land Minister of the Interior have decided to bar all GDR television and radio crews from the Federal Republic on the grounds such crews are engaged only in propaganda activity detrimental to the FRG. The ministerial session also proposed an exchange of officials between West Berlin and the FRG.

GDR international trade negotiator Behrendt reportedly informed West German and West Berlin businessmen the GDR intends to adhere to the international trade agreement for the time being but he was unable to offer any attractive prospects to the West German traders. He allegedly stated the GDR's "minimum program" was to raise the level of the IET agreement to a state-to-state basis but until that could be achieved the IET would continue to function.

The GDR media have in the past week carried a considerable volume of derogatory material on the visit of US Attorney General Robert Kennedy to West Berlin, asserting in one instance that his visit "abuses the air routes in a provocative manner" and that "it is up to the West Berliners to put the agitator in his place."

ASSESSMENT OF SOVIET INTENTIONS

The Polyakov article appears to be a further Soviet attempt to prod the US into what Moscow may consider the second phase of the Thompson-Gramyko talks. The commentary seems to express a Moscow view that both sides have now presented their opening positions, neither of which were expected to be accepted as a basis for negotiations, and that the exchanges to date should have demonstrated to the US the impossibility of an agreement limited to Berlin alone. Polyakov's singling out of the border issue as a vital point being "evaded" by the US is also probably related to the current Soviet actions in the air corridors. (The demand that aircraft submit border crossing times when flying to Berlin may be designed to obtain a form of Allied recognition for the principle that the GDR border constitutes an international frontier.)

Moscow evidently wishes to dissuade the US from further counter-measures on air access by threatening dire consequences for the prospects of negotiations if the West pursues a "policy of strength." At the same time, the Polyakov article indirectly justifies the USSR's own corridor harassment as suitable retaliation for Western restrictions on GDR travel and "aggressive" NATO defense plans for the East-West German border area. In voicing threats and counterthreats, Polyakov does not refer to a separate peace settlement excluding the West (as his earlier articles had done); the article states merely, "Those who think the USSR is now less resolved to achieve a peaceful settlement in Germany are utterly deceiving themselves."

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With respect to the specific issue of current air corridor activities, there is no change in our general assessment of Soviet intentions as presented last week. Soviet concentration on changing BASC procedures now appears aimed at establishing a distinction between the flight clearance process and guarantees for flight safety, with an attendant attempt to dilute Soviet responsibilities in connection with the latter. The Soviet note of February 17 also advanced the thesis that the West had no "unrestricted" rights in the corridors and its use of the air routes was at Soviet sufferance, while Soviet rights to fly in East Germany stemmed from agreements between the GDR and the USSR.

While there is no concrete evidence the GDR contemplates any specific moves in the immediate future, the increase in militant GDR propaganda with respect to Western provocations in West Berlin could portend an intensification of East German harassment in the Berlin area. Winzer's argumentation on passport and visa requirements indicates a GDR sensitivity to the charge of "blocking access" to Berlin; however, his justifications also hint at GDR plans to redesignate the present documentation required for travel between Berlin and the FRG as "passports and visa" to embellish the GDR's state frontier thesis. Under the new designation, the present procedures would then be allowed to continue until the state frontier concept was well established, at which point, normal bloc-type passport and visa requirements could gradually be introduced.

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